

REFORM SCHOOL BOYS INDENTURED TO DUXBURY SHOEMAKERS

Around the middle of the last century a few boys from the Lyman School, founded in 1846 as the first reform school (for boys) in the U.S. were indentured to Duxbury residents.

One snowy day we spent several hours in a warehouse at the now-defunct Lyman School perusing records of the first few hundred boys (aged 14 to 17) committed to the institution.

In 1849 Samuel Croucher was committee for malicious mischief during his minority. He had spent much of his time loafing about the streets smoking cigars and chewing tobacco. There is a questionnaire for each boy. Here are the notations for Samuel:

Size: small for his age.
Appearance: Rather stupid. Ever attended a Sabbath School? Yes.

Sam was indentured to a cooper in New Bedford, where his conduct was described as "generally without fault."

Another boy, taken to Lyman in a horse and "waggon," "has smoked since large enough to carry a cigar." On his release Ezra said "the state reform school has been a blessing to him." He was indentured to a boat builder in New Bedford.

In those days boys were committed for being a "common drunkard during minority," or for profanity, pilfering apples, peaches or cherries and for being addicted to the use of rum and tobacco.

George Irwin, 15, was committed in 1849 for the larceny of a horse and buggy during his minority. "He is a very secret, deep plotting, malicious boy." He was later remanded to the House of Correction in Cambridge "after

laboring with him for 2 years and being unable to produce any impression on his moral character."

Some boys were called "intemperate and often drunk"; they had a "strong desire for chewing tobacco." One such was Levi Stedman, 15, who was permitted to go on a whaling voyage.

One lad, Joseph Taylor, was only 10: "He is much given to indecent assaults on young girls." He wound up on a trading boat on the Mississippi, keeping "company not calculated to improve his habits."

John Foster, 9, was last seen after being released "in a low place tending bar." In a followup report he was called "a fast young man of the city" and was "charged with being an idler, spending his time at saloons, gaming rooms and houses of bad repute."

A social worker called the mother of one boy "the most ugly person I ever knew." Poor Julian Reed: "His parents are of the lowest caste in society....He says they are both married to other persons; both have kept licentious houses."

Duxbury Boys

Now we come to Duxbury boys. On Dec. 14, 1852, William Gordon, 15, was "indentured to Benjamin Ford, shoemaker of Duxbury." He had been committed by his parents for breaking and entering. "He is a great runaway." He slept out nights in barns, associated with the worst of boys and stole money from his father in the amount of \$4. "He says he was sent here for throwing stones at a boy."

On Feb. 15, 1854, Ford wrote

Lyman that his apprentice "has left for parts unknown for fear of being returned as he supposed his conduct as having been very bad of late." In 1854 Gordon was "seen idling about city with another boy of lower caste. Said he was going to work at boxmaking in Chelsea." In 1859 he was keeping "a dance hall in

North St., Boston. Looking hard. Wears a goatee."

George Fowle, 16, was committed in 1851. In 1855 he was indentured to James Curtis, a Duxbury shoemaker. Two years later he disappeared in the direction of South Reading.

In 1852, Otis W. Floyd, 13, was indentured to James H. Dawes, a

Duxbury shoemaker. Later he was indentured to Levi Cushing, another Duxbury shoemaker. Then, after living in Newburyport, he was indentured to Otis Peterson, another Duxbury shoemaker, in 1856.

There was no excuse for anyone going barefoot in Duxbury in the 1850s.